



Updates from the Field BEST PRACTICES

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THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL LEADERS IN PROMOTING HEALTH

With the devolution of health services, it became imperative for local governments in the Philippines to explore innovative ways to respond to the health needs of their constituents. While efforts to create new strategies and interventions are important, programs need health champions to encourage providers and mobilize resources to move programs forward. At the municipal/city level, this may be a local official, health personnel, a *Barangay* (village) Health Worker, a private individual, or an entire organization. These health champions make the difference in their localities; they make things happen.

Mayor Gregorio S. Facula



The first-ever municipal mayor of B.E. Dujali, 39 year-old Mayor Gregorio S. Facula has proven to be an effective health champion. Now in his second term, Mayor Facula has served as local chief executive of B.E. Dujali since its creation as a municipality in 1998. The Municipality of B.E. Dujali is located in the Province of Davao del Norte, in the region of Southern Mindanao.

Mayor Facula's involvement in the health sector started in 1982 when he became a Barangay Health Worker (BHW). This came in the wake of his disqualification as Barangay Captain, after serving for six months, because he was under age (he was only 19 at that time). Apart from his strong sense of community service, his decision to become a BHW was influenced by his own experience. His interest in health stems from the fact that his mother died of cancer, his father became afflicted with tuberculosis, he was sickly as a boy, and his locality had a high prevalence of schistosomiasis and malaria. He had to drop out of college in his sophomore year to take care of his sick mother.

He served as a BHW from 1982 to 1986, during which time his barangay became a regional awardee for primary health care. In 1986, he was

elected as Municipal Councilor of Carmen, Davao del Norte. In 2000, after 12 years of intermittent schooling, he finally received his college diploma (in business, with a major in management). He attended special training on local governance and is currently studying for a master's degree in environmental planning.

In 1999, Mayor Facula organized a group of male family planning advocates to emphasize the importance of family management among men and orient them to reproductive health issues. Every first quarter of the year, he also goes around to the major communities to present his "Ulat sa Bayan" (Report to the People). This report includes an analysis of the municipal health situation. After his presentation, a team of stakeholders conducts an array of activities that includes mass feeding, medical consultation, minor surgical procedures (such as cyst removal), immunization, dental services, distribution of seeds, civil registration, and tax collection. The mayor is available for dialogues to discuss pressing and confidential issues affecting the locality. This activity, known as *Serbisyo sa Bayan* (Service to the People), is a joint undertaking of the municipal government, provincial government, Office of the Congressman, local representatives of national agencies, barangay officials, *Sangguniang Bayan* (Municipal Council) members, private sector, nongovernmental organizations, religious leaders, local health personnel, and BHWs. The Office of the Congressman, for instance, provides medicines for the people and food for the service providers.

Since 1999, Mayor Facula has also organized annual outreach activities to enable people to avail themselves of major surgical procedures (for example, for myoma, goiter, and gallbladder). These activities are also the products of the local government unit's collaborative efforts with other stakeholders. The municipal government is mainly responsible for finding the patients and defraying the board and lodging costs of the patients and medical staff. The province provides the medicines, while the Davao Regional Hospital provides the mobile OR and the specialists. Each outreach activity lasts for about a week and is held in a public school, where some classrooms have been converted into hospital wards to house the patients and the medical staff.

Fully aware of the prohibitive cost of curative health care, Mayor Facula enrolled his BHWs in PhilHealth's Indigent Program, which provides health insurance coverage to the poorest families all over the country. He believes that this is better than giving them a monthly allowance. The local government also provides a travel allowance to BHWs to participate in training. The BHWs' monthly incentive comes from the



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province (PhP50 or US\$1 per BHW) and the barangay (ranges from PhP50-300 or US\$1-6 per BHW).

Recently, the municipality of B.E. Dujali received a grant from the Matching Grant Program of the Department of Health (DOH). The local government used a portion of the grant to purchase BCG vaccines to ensure that eligible children do not miss the chance of being fully immunized. A substantial portion was used to conduct the Community-Based Monitoring and Information System (CBMIS) survey, which is prescribed in all areas participating in the Matching Grant Program. As a hands-on manager, Mayor Facula participated in the training in the use of the CBMIS that was conducted as part of the Matching Grant Program Technical Assistance Package.

Among his other health priorities are to (1) increase the percentage of families with access to a family health worker to 83%, (2) reduce the prevalence of schistosomiasis, and (3) reduce the prevalence of malnutrition from 18% to 8% by 2004. He continues to support the national and provincial health programs while pursuing local health initiatives. He has also signed a Pledge of Commitment, together with the Sangguniang Bayan and the Department of Interior and Local Government, to set aside his personal agenda for the common good as well as to professionalize governance.

Due to his untiring efforts and strong commitment to public service, Mayor Facula was able to improve the municipality's performance in meeting the people's minimum basic needs. The municipality used to have the second-highest level of unmet basic needs in the province (which is composed of seven municipalities and three component cities), but now it ranks fifth and this was achieved in just one year. He was also recognized as one of the 10 Outstanding Public Servants in Southern Mindanao, became a national winner for the implementation of the Comprehensive Integrated Delivery of Social Services Program, received the Rafael M. Salas Award for Population and Family Home Management (Regional Level), and was recognized by the province for mainstreaming gender advocacy. Moreover, the municipality of B.E. Dujali was ranked first in the area of good governance, based on a survey conducted by the Philippine Center for Policy Studies covering all local government units in its two pilot areas, Davao del Norte and Bulacan.

As far as Mayor Facula is concerned, this recognition resulted from having a blueprint for the development of B.E. Dujali and an executive agenda that is doable. He also attributes these achievements to his adherence to the consultative process, which ensures adequate representation of all sectors in all aspects of local governance.

Dr. Ismael Naypa, Jr.

Dr. Ismael Naypa, Jr., a 43-year old surgeon who hails from the nearby Province of Misamis Oriental, continues to play a crucial role in Valencia City's efforts to manage its population growth. Valencia City, which is located in the Province of Bukidnon (Northern Mindanao), is one of the 145 local government units currently participating in the Department of Health's Matching Grant Program.

Dr. Naypa, a 1983 graduate of Cebu City's Southwestern University, is a family planning advocate. His interest in family planning is born



out of the fact that population growth continues to outpace economic growth in most countries, including the Philippines, contributing to widespread poverty.

He believes that everyone has a role to play in ensuring a decent life for everybody. For his part, he would like to make a difference in the lives of individual Filipino families by making his expertise available to all those who need it. He is particularly interested in promoting vasectomy services since vasectomy is a very simple procedure and can be performed outside the confines of a clinic.

Dr. Naypa's exposure to the Matching Grant Program gave him the opportunity to pursue this interest. Dr. Naypa was among those invited to attend the orientation meeting on the Matching Grant Program, representing the Monsanto Community Hospital, whose owner was known for his community services. It was during this meeting that the idea of having a mini-operating room in the Rural Health Unit was hatched. Free sterilization services for the residents of Valencia City have been provided in this mini-OR since June 2000.

Dr. Naypa has agreed to perform bilateral tubal ligations (BTLs) and vasectomies for interested Valencia City residents for a minimal honorarium paid by the local government unit. He provides these services even during outreach activities organized by the City Health Office for the municipality's hard-to-reach barangays. To date, Dr. Naypa has performed 188 BTLs and 20 vasectomies for the City Health Office.

At this stage, Dr. Naypa is considering how to reach more people, for example, bringing voluntary surgical sterilization (VSS) services, particularly vasectomy services, to where the people are. He plans to initiate discussions with the Provincial Governor about creating a mobile team to visit municipalities to provide VSS services. The plan envisions the provincial government providing transportation while the respective municipalities will pay for the necessary drugs, medicines, and supplies.

"Think globally; act locally." True to this saying, Dr. Naypa continues to focus on the families of Valencia City to help in the overall efforts to moderate population growth. He says: "If I can't solve the problems of the world, at least I am able to help the family."

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